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From: Hutchinson, Marcella
Sent: Fri 8/7/2015 3:30:53 PM
Subject: FW: [West Slope] Huge mine spill fouls Colorado River, raising endangered species and public health concerns

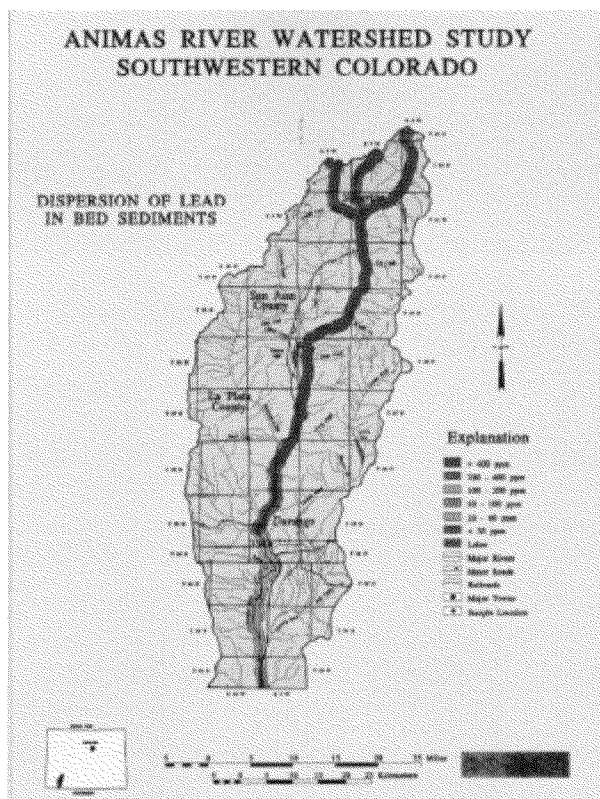
FYI- local paper

From: west-slope@googlegroups.com [mailto:west-slope@googlegroups.com] **On Behalf Of** Loretta Lohman
Sent: Thursday, August 06, 2015 5:54 PM
To: west-slope@googlegroups.com; wq-news@googlegroups.com
Subject: [West Slope] Huge mine spill fouls Colorado River, raising endangered species and public health concerns

Summit County Citizens Voice

Huge mine spill fouls Colorado River, raising endangered species and public health concerns

Summit County Citizens Voice by Bob Berwyn 5:20 pm



The Animas River watershed took a blow this week, as about 1 million gallons of contaminated mine water spilled into Cement Creek, at the Animas headwaters.

Conservation groups decry EPA's lax response

Staff Report

FRISCO — Conservation advocates say the EPA's cavalier response to a toxic spill from a mine near Silverton, Colorado shows a disregard for potential impacts to wildlife downstream of the spill.

According to the EPA, a state and federal remediation team Wednesday morning unexpectedly triggered the spill of mine waste water into Cement Creek. As much as 1 million gallons of contaminated water that was contained behind a makeshift dam was released into the creek. The water is tainted by toxic heavy metals and is now flowing downstream in the Animas River toward Durango.

In a statement, the EPA said that, due to longstanding water quality impairment associated with heavy metals there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed and populations in the Animas River have historically been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton. The agency will be monitoring and sampling water in the Animas River farther downstream to assess the impacts.

The Animas River was closed Thursday to boaters and other users because of potential health

risks, according to the Durango Herald, which also reported that the city has shut down its intakes from the Animas River, while Colorado Parks and Wildlife is trying to determine if the water is toxic to fish by placing caged trout at different points in the stream.

The Center for Biological Diversity pointed out that the Animas flows into the San Juan River, which includes habitat for several species of federally endangered fish and birds. Many of these, including razorback suckers and Colorado pikeminnow, are already afflicted by exposure to toxic compounds, such as selenium and mercury, associated with mine waste.

“The fact that fish populations in the upper Animas have already been decimated by mining pollution offers no comfort to concerns about pollution impacts farther downstream,” said CBD’s Taylor McKinnon.

“Endangered species downstream of this spill are already afflicted by same toxic compounds like mercury and selenium that may be in this waste,” said McKinnon. “These species are hanging by a thread, and every new bit of toxic exposure makes a bad situation worse. EPA’s downplaying of potential impacts is troubling and raises deeper questions about the thoroughness of its mine-reclamation efforts.”

The Center will seek records from the federal agency about this week’s spill under the Freedom of Information Act. It will scrutinize the EPA’s compliance with the Endangered Species Act and other laws in connection with potential impacts to endangered species from mine-reclamation programs and disasters.

“This unfortunate incident underscores the very reason EPA and the State of Colorado are focused on addressing the environmental risks at abandoned mine sites,” said David Ostrander, director of EPA’s emergency response program in Denver. “We are thankful that the personnel working on this mine cleanup project were unharmed. EPA will be assessing downstream conditions to ensure any impacts and concerns are addressed, as necessary.”

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